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GOVERNOR BARBOUR NAMES FORMER BILOXI MAYOR GERALD
BLESSEY
AS MISSISSIPPI COAST HOUSING DIRECTOR

GULFPORT, Mississippi - Governor Haley Barbour today announced his appointment of former Biloxi Mayor Gerald Blessey as Mississippi Coast Housing Director, a position designed to facilitate progress in post-Katrina housing recovery.

"Tremendous resources have been devoted to restoring and rebuilding housing on the Gulf Coast. While a lot of progress has been made, it hasn't been fast enough. As we approach the third anniversary of Katrina, it is essential to pull out all stops to get more housing into service as quickly as possible," Governor Barbour said at a news conference.

"I want to emphasize that Gerald Blessey didn't ask for this job. I drafted him," Governor Barbour said. "As a native of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, a former mayor, state legislator and involved member of the community, Gerald has a unique perspective on what it takes to get things done. I appreciate his willingness to help facilitate the vital job of housing recovery."

Blessey, 66, will work under a professional services contract through the Mississippi Development Authority. His main assignment will be to work with local nonprofit agencies, governments, advocates, and other organizations to speed up development and construction of more workforce housing on the Coast.

"There is widespread agreement that workforce housing is absolutely essential to Coast recovery and many people and agencies are working hard at it," Blessey said. "My challenge from the Governor is to do everything humanly possible to coordinate and facilitate these efforts, and help finish the job."

Blessey represented Harrison County in the Mississippi House of Representatives from 1972-81 and served two terms as mayor of Biloxi, 1981-89. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Governor Barbour appointed him to the Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding

and Renewal, where he chaired the Land Use Committee. He is also President and General Counsel, Tradition Properties, Inc., a Coast housing development.

Born in Biloxi, Blessey is married to Dr. Paige Gutierrez; the couple has two children, Grace Blessey, 23, a law student at William & Mary, and Mary Blessey, 19, a sophomore at Millsaps College. They are members of Our Lady of Fatima Parish Catholic Church in Biloxi.

Blessey earned his B.A. and J.D. degrees from the University of Mississippi and an LL.M. from Harvard Law School. He is a Vietnam veteran, serving as a 1st lieutenant in the U.S. Army, and was awarded the Bronze Star. He has practiced law in Biloxi since 1970 and been involved in a number of professional and civic endeavors.

He is a former board member of the Mississippi Humanities Council and the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi. He is a Fellow, Mississippi Bar Foundation, and his professional associations include the Urban Land Institute and the Congress for New Urbanism.

The press conference announcing Blessey's appointment was held at the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Nonprofit Center in Gulfport, where his office will be located. Named in recognition of the organization's contribution to the purchase of the facility, the building on Seaway Road is jointly owned by United Way of South Mississippi, Mississippi Gulf Coast Chamber of Commerce Foundation, Gulf Coast Community Foundation and the Gulf Coast Business Council Research Foundation.

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